

VZCZCXYZ0006
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHNY #0583 1281247
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 081247Z MAY 06
FM AMEMBASSY OSLO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3922
INFO RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 3893
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY 2834

UNCLAS OSLO 000583

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STOCKHOLM FOR FAS:PTHURSLAND

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [ETRD](#) [WTO](#) [EFIS](#) [NO](#)
SUBJECT: RUSSIANS LIFT BAN ON NORWEGIAN SALMON

¶1. (U) Two Norwegian salmon producers resumed exports of fresh chilled salmon to Russia after receiving export approvals from Russian authorities on April 24. Producers began shipping in the first week of May, officially ending the four month old Russian ban on Norwegian salmon. According to the Norwegian Seafood Export Council, the two producers, Pan Fish AS and Fresh Harvest AS, received the OK to ship fresh salmon following joint Norwegian-Russian inspections during the first week of April. Two other producers were also inspected at the time but have not yet received approvals to ship product. The four companies inspected were among the largest processing houses in Norway.

¶2. (U) On January 1, the Russian Agriculture Ministry placed a ban on all fresh Norwegian salmon imports after allegedly finding abnormally large amounts of lead and cadmium. Subsequent tests by Norwegian officials concluded that the salmon was safe to eat. Norwegian authorities had been working with Russian Agriculture Ministry officials to get the ban removed ever since. Joint Norwegian-Russian inspections of aquaculture facilities were held from March 27 to April 5 and the issue was discussed at the political level during Russian Prime Minister Fradkov's visit to Oslo in late March.

¶3. (U) Russia is Norway's third largest and fastest growing seafood export market. In 2005, Norway shipped USD 533 million worth of seafood to Russia. While the temporary loss of the growing Russian market hurt, it did not materially damage Norwegian producers as they were able to divert their fresh and chilled salmon shipments to Asia and other Eastern European countries. The remainder of their production was frozen for later shipment. Interestingly, the Russians did not stop frozen salmon imports which continued during the ban.

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT. Some observers believe that health issues may not have been the real reason for imposing the ban. The Russians may have been concerned about Norwegian salmon flooding their market -- Norway is the world's leading salmon producer -- or they may have wanted to retaliate for increasingly aggressive Norwegian regulation of Russian trawlers operating in Norwegian waters. Regardless of the reason for the ban, its removal is good news for the two approved Norwegian producers. Additional approvals will ease fears in some quarters over Russians using health regulations as foreign policy tools. END COMMENT.
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